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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the television program "Cheers" and demonstrates one way of interpreting the complexity of messages within the program. The interplay of visual messages within the "Cheers" programming is referred to as intertextuality, or the relation of one text to another to express an idea. Two basic types of intertextuality--horizontal and vertical--serve as a framework for this analysis of "Cheers." Horizontal textuality refers to relations between primary texts "along the axis of genre and content." In "Cheers," genre intertextuality means examining how the show works as a situation comedy, and in particular how it differs from other situation comedies. Content intertextuality refers to the use of specific allusions to other texts. The second type of intertextuality is vertical, defined as the relation between a primary text and those texts which refer to and discuss the primary texts. In the case of "Cheers," this includes analyses in the popular press. These secondary texts work to promote the circulation of selected meanings of the primary text. The carefully crafted comedic statements in "Cheers" carry social and cultural overtones, presenting an intellectual challenge to the viewer who actively attends to the interplay. After a description of the characters, this paper includes a general and an episode analysis. It then shows how the titles of the shows have been gleaned from classic literature and places "Cheers" in the comedic perspective with other television comedies. (Contains 18 references.) (AEF)

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A Thinking Person's Comedy: A Study Of Intertextuality In "Cheers"

Anthony Hlynka and Nancy Nelson Knupfer

Abstract

This paper explains the nature of intertextuality concerning television programming, then analyzes the modern television comedy *Cheers*, comparing and contrasting it to classic works. The lead author of this paper is a 17-year-old high school student. The paper is a commentary on the level of critical expertise a properly motivated and visually literate high school student can display.

As society places more emphasis on the visual media and less emphasis on reading, educators must examine the messages carried through the visual media. Further, they must learn to read visual media and in turn, teach their students to practice critical viewing skills. Television is a visual medium that carries powerful messages to people and helps to shape their actions, beliefs, and empirical knowledge (DeVaney, 1994). Commercial television employs story, along with visual effects, to impart cultural influence upon the viewers.

Commercial television is one of today's major transmitters of culture. Many aspects of social roles are reflected and even exaggerated in television programming. For example, patterns of speech, dress, fashion, family rituals, group behaviors, and other social roles are simultaneously present in television programs (DeVaney, 1994). Further, the visual message employs the power of motion combined with color and sound to call upon the affective domain, thus employing powerful, emotional impact that can greatly influence the viewers. Advertisers and political campaign managers know this and thus, they utilize the television medium to its fullest capacity to deliver specific messages to targeted groups of people.

As more television, videos, and multimedia carry visually dependent messages into schools and homes, consumers will need to educate themselves, their children, and their students about how to read visuals and their accompanying auditory text. The text of television includes the story within the visual and verbal channels, which work together to impart the message. Thus, the grammar of television is one that must be studied, analyzed, and interpreted.

Historical works of literature can be portrayed in many ways while maintaining the intended message. Shakespeare's great plays are an example. Intended as visual works, many people read these plays in books and study the literature accordingly. Now the video versions are available for check-out at most public libraries and are indeed often recommended as a starting place to understanding a play, prior to reading the text.

Television programs are not that much different. They begin as plays written for screen presentation, but the viewing audience usually has no chance nor desire to read and analyze the printed version of the program. Thus, visually literate television viewers must learn to interpret the visual and verbal text of what they see on the screen at the time that it is displayed.

In the 1600s, there was evidence of people first believing what they read in print through their reactions to Shakespeare's works. Today there is ample evidence of people believing what they see in the visual media of film, television, computer, and other communications media. For example, see the collection of literature devoted to analysis of campaign advertisements on television.

To adequately prepare people to understand visual messages and then to critique their value and believability, it is necessary to prepare them to be visually literate! This literacy calls upon various theories that are beyond the scope of this paper, but at its heart depends upon viewers to be able to receive, understand, and critically examine the messages to the point where they can interpret the visual media on their own.

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This paper addresses the television program *Cheers* and demonstrates one way of interpreting the complexity of messages within the program. While *Cheers* indeed properly belongs within the domain of pop culture, the examination of such programs is critical if one is to fully grasp the impact of television media on society. Serious analysis of television programs is under utilized in most *visual literacy* curricula. Yet, it provides a rich variety of material from which to choose.

Intertextuality Defined

This paper shows how students can examine television content as the literature of our time. Such visual literature employs interplay among text, imagery, culture, and meaning. This interplay of messages within the *Cheers* programming will be referred to as *intertextuality*. Intertextuality is the relation of one text to another in order to get across an idea. In theory, intertextuality proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and further, that a range of textual knowledge is brought to bear upon it. Intertextuality exists in the spaces between texts and their meanings (Fiske, 1987).

The term *intertextuality* is used in this paper according to the usage of Scholes and Fiske. Scholes writes that "the common principle is that just as signs refer to other signs, rather than directly to things, texts refer to other texts" (Scholes, 1982, p. 145). Fiske, likewise, prefers to use the word *intertextuality* to describe the nature of television text. He writes, "Reading and talking about television are part of the process of making a text out of it and are determinants of what text is actually made...The textuality of television is essentially intertextual" (Fiske, 1987, p. 15). Fiske further writes that a textual study of television includes "the intertextual relations of television within itself, with other media, and with conversation" (p. 16). Thus the term *intertextuality* is central to the discourse of this paper.

John Fiske (1987) identifies two basic types of intertextuality which can serve as a framework for our analysis of *Cheers*. These are horizontal and vertical textuality. Horizontal textuality refers to relations between primary texts "along the axis of genre and content" (Fiske, 1987). In *Cheers*, genre intertextuality means examining how *Cheers* works as a situation comedy, and in particular how it is different from other situation comedies.

Content intertextuality refers to the use of specific allusions to other texts. *Cheers* is full of such allusions and that relation is the major focus of this paper. The intertextuality within great literature, such as works by Ibsen, Checkov, Dickens, and Shakespeare, deconstructs the traditional opposition of bar versus culture. The series constantly brings culture into the bar setting, which of course, is in real life incongruous. The *Cheers* bar is a cultured bar. However, this statement itself can be historically deconstructed. The original medieval tavern and coffee house was indeed a center for lively intellectual debate.

The second type of intertextuality is vertical. Fiske defines this as the relation between a primary text and those texts which refer to and discuss the primary texts. "Vertical intertextuality consists of a primary text's relations with other texts which refer specifically to it. These secondary texts, such as criticism or publicity, work to promote the circulation of selected meanings of the primary text." (Fiske, 1987, p. 117). These include secondary texts, such as critical studies. In the case of *Cheers* this includes analyses in the popular press such as *Life*, *TV Guide*, *Sports Illustrated*, and other sources. These secondary texts, such as criticism or publicity, work to promote the circulation of selected meanings of the primary text. All these attempt to *explain* the function of the series from a particular point of view.

The idea of a visual medium being described as text is not new. Reading visual information is a skill that must be developed. Interpreting, analyzing, and critiquing visual information depends upon proper reading of the visual information.

Television is composed of scripts, put into verbal and visual form along with other trappings. The field of visual literacy includes the study of visual and verbal information. Consistent with this approach, Ann DeVaney discusses the "grammar" of television (DeVaney, 1991). In turn, Michael Apple describes the Channel One television news program as one of the new "texts" of education (Apple, 1993). Thus the idea of television

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programming as a verbo-visual medium fits well with its analysis considering the concept of intertextuality.

Television Viewers and Cheers

Television viewers "are not cultural dupes lapping up any pap that is produced for them" (Fiske, 1986, p. 214) and *Cheers* is not merely a mindless comedy. Rather, the writers took much care and effort in molding it to fit their idea of an intellectual comedy, aimed at an intelligent audience. Jokes are not pulled out of a gag file, but are carefully crafted intertextual statements with visual and literary allusions. These allusions carry social and cultural overtones, presenting an intellectual challenge to the viewer who actively attends to the interplay.

More than a simple comedy striving to keep viewers entertained, *Cheers* is full of intertextual references, which engage the intellect and make it all the more humorous. This makes *Cheers* a thinking-person's comedy. It becomes clear that when watching *Cheers*, one needs to consider more than just the surface appearance.

The Cheers Program

Cheers was the creation of Glen Charles, Les Charles, and James Burrows. Their goal was to create an American *Fawlty Towers*, John Cleese's classic 1980s slapstick comedy set in a British inn. The show itself was full of comic characters. *Cheers* was the source of some of the greatest comic talent since Jackie Gleason of the sixties. Director James Burrows calls the show "lightning in a bottle" (Darrach, 1993, p. 64).

In early versions of the show, *Cheers* was to be set in a country club, or a hotel in Las Vegas, but the writers finally settled on a bar, primarily because "no one had to have an excuse to come into a bar" (Darrach, 1993, p. 58). On September 30th, 1982, a semi-intellectual college student walked into a bar. This marked the beginning of *Cheers*, soon to become one of the most popular television shows in history. This Boston watering hole would be frequented vicariously every Thursday night by millions of viewers across North America, Europe and Australia.

The setting of the show was a simple one: A bar in the middle of the Boston common, owned by ex-Red Sox pitcher, Sam Malone. Together with Sam was a variety of bar regulars, the small pub was their home. *Cheers* was a window into the lives, troubles, and adventures of these people. There was no need to have intricate plots and complex story lines; "Just open the door, and the stories will walk in" (Darrach, 1993, p. 64).

In the first season, however, despite rave reviews and testaments of its impending success, *Cheers* ranked in the last place out of seventy-seven programs. But when *Cheers* won five Emmies in its first year, the directors decided to give it a second chance. "It was like holding our own feet to the fire. We could have been badly burned" (Darrach, 1993, p. 64). Happily, in its second season, the show's ratings began to improve, and in its fourth season, *Cheers* had popped into the top ten. For the rest of its seven seasons, it would remain there, never more than four shows away from the top, and frequently the number one television show in America. At the end of its impressive run, *Cheers* had aired 275 episodes during eleven seasons, won 26 Emmies, and obtained a record 111 Emmy nominations.

Timing also contributed to the success of *Cheers*. In the time of slapstick and even crude comedies, such as *Three's Company*, *Cheers* was one of the first television shows to break this comedic mold, to get television out of the rut of the seventies in which it seemed to be stuck.

The Characters

To understand *Cheers*, you must understand its characters, who are the *bar regulars*. These barflies include Sam Malone, Norm Peterson, Clifford Claven, Carla LeBec, Woody Boyd, Rebecca Howe, Frasier Crane, Lilith Sternin-Crane, Diane Chambers, and Ernie Pantuso.

Sam Malone

Sam Malone, played by Ted Danson, is the owner of *Cheers* and the central character of the show. His parents were Irish immigrants and he was brought up in humble surroundings. Sam's big break came to him during his senior year of high school, when he was recruited to play class A baseball for the Boston Red Sox. He left high school and joined the team as a relief pitcher for only a few years. He ended up an alcoholic. After his recovery,

he bought the bar. Sam Malone casts a vision of a classic male chauvinist playboy.

Norm Peterson

Norm Peterson (George Wendt) may be one of the funniest characters on all of modern television. Once an accountant, and then a painter, he now is professionally unemployed. His whole life is the bar, living vicariously through Sam Malone, and making *Cheers* his home. "Every night he bellies up to the bar with a froth of beer, making notes on what fools these mortals be. Norm's one-liners have become so popular that they have been collected and are known as "Normisms."

Clifford Claven

Clifford Claven (John Ratzenburger) is the bar know-it-all. There is not a subject in this world on which he is not an expert. He is an encyclopedia of irrelevant information and misinformation. A forty-seven-year-old mailman, Cliff still lives with his mother in a tiny apartment.

Carla LeBec

Carla Tortelli (Rhea Perlman) is a survivor. After going through at least two husbands, countless lovers, and eight kids, she is outspoken and honest, but not mean. Carla isn't afraid to say things that most people would love to say, but do not. Everybody likes Carla even though she never runs out of venom. Perlman explains, "It's such a pleasure to hear somebody say all the vicious things you don't have the guts to say yourself" (Burrows, 1990b).

Woody Boyd

Woody Boyd (Woody Harrelson), Sam's bartending partner, "must have sucked on the seltzer nozzle until-wheeeeeee!-all the bubbles went to his brain" (Darrach, 1993, p. 62). Woody is naive and childlike. From a small farm town, he is a country hick who is just happy to live in the city.

Rebecca Howe

Rebecca Howe (Kirstie Alley) is the manager of *Cheers*. She came into the bar as a no-nonsense business women, and like others, soon became a useless, pitiful blubbering mass of her former self. She used to have responsibilities, importance and demand respect, but she now is reduced to carrying a cigar box full of receipts around. She's a money junkie who just wants to marry a rich man so she can goof off the rest of her life.

Frasier Crane

Frasier Crane (Kelsey Grammer) "is a shrink who shrank" (Darrach, 1993, p. 63). Originally, he came into Cheers as an accomplished and renowned psychiatrist, and as Diane Chamber's new boyfriend. However, Diane left him, he developed a drinking problem, and his reputation tumbled. To pay off his overdrawn bar tab, he ends up scrubbing *Cheers*' toilets.

Frasier is pompous and inept, yet longs to be "one of the boys." He marries Lilith Sternin-Crane, regains his reputation and career, and remains an outstanding and influential member of Boston society. He takes it upon himself to introduce culture, knowledge, and literature into the bar.

Lilith Sternin-Crane

Lilith Sternin-Crane (Bebe Neuwirth) is Frasier Crane's wife, and a physiotherapist. With pitch black hair and absolutely no skin pigment whatsoever, most would say that she should come with a set of bat wings. However, actress Neuwirth says, "There's something sweet about Lilith. She just doesn't know how to be with people" (Darrach, 1993, p. 62). Unlike the rest of the people who walk into Cheers, Lilith is not sucked into their world of idle thoughts, beer, and stupid ideas.

Diane Chambers

Diane Chambers (Shelly Long) came to *Cheers* as a stop off and remained at the bar for five years, becoming a waitress. A perpetual college student, she attempted to *civilize* the bar patrons, but to no avail. As the first intellectual in the bar, she is noticeably out of place, and is frequently the butt of the others' jokes. Throughout the time in which Diane was at *Cheers*, she and Sam were mad about each other, but not made for each other. She was "a culture snob in graduate school," and he was "a galoot who had wasted his youth on the mound" (Darrach, 1993, p. 59).

Ernie Pantuso

Ernie Pantuso (Nick Colasanto) was Sam's baseball coach when in the major leagues, and holds the record of being hit the most times in the head by a pitch. He

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becomes the bartender at Cheers. Nicknamed "Coach," he is a good listener, very sweet, and longs to be smart.

General Analysis

Once the characters are understood, then the structure of this television comedy can be examined in greater detail. When television comedy is being analyzed, the majority of programs fall in to one of two major humor categories, slapstick and intellectual.

Slapstick is basically humor at the expense of others. The jokes are not necessarily tasteful, and the only thing that they are really good for is a cheap laugh. Examples of slapstick humor includes *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* and *Three's Company* during the seventies. In general, slapstick humor requires no thought. The joke does not have to be turned over in the mind to understand it, but rather it receives an instantaneous response of laughter.

On the other hand, intellectual humor consists of jokes that require some deliberation, and some degree of intelligence to understand. They are not common jokes that are used until they become clichés, but are original and fresh. The writers of these jokes take great care in their structure, and it is important for them to be well-written and contrived.

The audience of intellectual humor is very different from that of slapstick humor, for intellectual jokes are directed at the thinking person. Many of these jokes allude to literature, historical events, and current happenings. Interestingly enough, when a viewer of slapstick watches a program that incorporates intellectual humor, the majority of the jokes go uninterpreted, and are not understood.

Therefore, one must wonder why the writers of *Cheers* would use intellectual humor since it is so much more involved. The answer is simple: the rewards are greater. *Cheers* could reach millions of people every week and did the toughest thing there is to do; it made them laugh. The rewards of using your mind to watch television rather than using your eyes is something that the writers of *Cheers* caught on to. When a member of the viewing audience understands a joke, not because it is painfully obvious, but by drawing upon accumulated knowledge to understand it, the viewer finds happiness in his or her own intelligence. This changes the viewer from being someone who is passively watching, to someone who is actually involved in the show, and able to laugh with the characters. This intellectual transportation from the audience to the show itself is what makes *Cheers* great. A testament of the success of *Cheers* is illustrated by noted author Kurt Vonnegut's statement that *Cheers* is a comic masterpiece, which he would rather have written than all of his other works combined, because each line is significant and funny (Bianculli, 1992).

Cheers draws on a number of intellectual resources to make it funny. The writers employ intellectual humor in many different ways. The use of intertextuality in *Cheers* is its life blood. *Cheers* uses intertextuality in the form of literary and cultural allusions, drawing upon the visual aspects of the program to enhance the meaning. This makes *Cheers* a comedy of thought, rather than actions.

Tertiary texts are those produced by the viewers. "Tertiary texts occur at the level of the viewer and his/her social relations. Studying them gives us access to the meanings that are in circulation at any one time" (Fiske, 1987, p.117). In the case of *Cheers,* this is best examined through electronic discussion groups available on the Internet. *Cheers* became one of the very early programs to have an electronic discussion group, specifically a listserve connected with the series. *Cheers* fans from around the world could comment on issues of interest to them. Thus *Cheers* pioneered this genre of discussion. Unfortunately *Cheers* came to an end before the influx of electronic newsgroups. Today, electronic discussion groups exist *for Rush Limbaugh, David Letterman,* and situation comedies such as *Sienfeld* and *The Simpsons.* However, searching the Internet still can reveal generic *Cheers* trivia, sound, documents such as Norm quotes, and episode guides. The importance of these secondary or vertical intertextual documents is that they circulate selected meanings of the text.

Cheers is unusual in that it seems quite immune to contemporary events. Existing from 1982-1993, it makes no references to major issues of the day such as the Gulf War and the U.S. presidential elections of George Bush or Ronald Reagan. *Cheers* did not coexist in the real world. Oddly, however, *Cheers* existed in the same

universe as other television programs. Characters from other shows have appeared on *Cheers*, or vice versa. Examples include Carla going to St. Eligius Hospital from *St. Elsewhere* to deliver her baby, or Norm and Cliff taking a fishing holiday on Sandpiper airlines from the television series *Wings*.

On the other hand, *Cheers* has been established as not belonging to other universes. This is accomplished by having other television shows appear prominently on *Cheers* in the role of television shows. These television shows include *Spencer for Hire*, *Jeopardy*, the *Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson and the *Arsenio Hall Show*. *Cheers* most definitely co-exists in a world of pop culture and real culture.

Episode Analysis

To illustrate the role of intertextuality in *Cheers*, a number of episodes can be analyzed to show how the use of intertextuality makes *Cheers* even more humorous. The evolution of the characters occurs gradually, and patterns of change emerge from season to season.

Show Down, Part 1 of 2

The first such example is of a character trying to bring culture into the bar setting is seen in the episode *Show Down, Part 1 of 2*, (Burrows, 1983a). Here, Diane told the bar patrons there was "something extraordinary" on the television. The barflies quickly surrounded the television expecting to see a hockey game, or something similar. They were surprised to see Wagner's *Das Rhiengold* in front of them. They were about to go back to their beer and idle chatter, when Diane insisted that they watch at least ten minutes of it. They agreed to do so, but gave up with a groan in a matter of seconds.

On *Cheers*, only Diane was aware of this television event, and was determined to have the bar patrons watch it. In this attempt, she was unsuccessful in enlightening them. Were this the only incident of cultural intertextuality, we would think nothing of it. However this was followed by many more intertextual references to culture, literature, and even intelligence. During the first season of *Cheers*, the only cultured character in the bar was Diane, who persisted in trying to make the barflies appreciate culture although she was largely unsuccessful.

Homicidal Ham

The episode *Homicidal Ham* (Burrows, 1983b), intertwines play acting with reality. Diane made the mistake of trying to help an ex-convict with his dream of becoming an actor. Once convicted for murder, Andy Andy attempted to rob *Cheers* so he would be sent back to prison where he was more comfortable. Diane helped him pursue his dream of acting by guiding him in presenting a scene from William Shakespeare's *Othello*, which could lead to a job if Andy Andy performed well enough. Before Andy and Diane present the "strangulation scene" from *Othello*, Andy confessed that he loved Diane. Diane believed that he only meant this as a friend. Yet when Andy witnessed Sam giving Diane a good luck kiss, his jealousy overpowered him, and he vowed to kill her in the scene. Diane realized this while introducing the scene during its presentation to the bar patrons. She attempted to stall, but to no avail, and mid-way through the scene, Andy began strangling Diane. The viewers believed it was part of the play, until Diane screamed for help, at which point, Andy was restrained.

This episode of *Cheers* is especially important because it exhibits dual content intertextuality. Not only is the scene from *Othello* being acted out in the episode, but the episode itself runs along a similar theme of *Othello*, and includes love, deception, and vengeance. In this episode, Diane was not only attempting to help a fellow human at reestablishing his life, but in the process, she was also introducing Shakespearean theater to the bar. The patrons were willing to miss their boxing match on television in order to watch Diane and Andy's presentation, which was received with little complaining or sarcasm. Diane's attempt to introduce Shakespeare to the audience of barflies is best summed up in Diane's introduction of the play and Cliff's response, "Now, I know I don't have to explain the play to Professor DeWit, but it might be helpful, to some of you, if I explained what you're about to see." "Duhhhh, I wun-der who sheeee's tal-king a-bout Nooorm? Duheehuh" (Burrows, 1983b). In earlier episodes, such as "Show Down, Part 1 of 2" (Burrows, 1983a), the bar patrons would not even give Diane's suggestions a

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chance, but now they were willingly watching *Othello*.

Old Flames

In the next example, *Old Flames* (Burrows, 1983c), Diane attempted to reveal to Sam the pleasures of art, and took him gallery hopping. When she told the barflies that "Mr. Malone is on his way to developing an appreciation of non-representational art" (Burrows, 1983c), they were doubtful of course. To test him, Carla asked Sam to name any piece of art that he saw. When this was met by silence, she asked him to name any piece of art in the world. To the everyone's surprise, Sam actually provided an answer, "Michaelangelo's two muscular guys touching fingers" (Burrows, 1983c).

This example of Diane's continuing quest to widen Sam's appreciation of culture, was met more or less halfway. Sam went to the art galleries with her, with no complaint. The *old* Sam would never have been done that. Unfortunately for Diane, not much of her work actually sunk in, but it was evident that she was slowly getting the bar patrons to appreciate, or at least not complain about art and culture. Humor also lies in the fact that Norm and Cliff thought Sam's answer of "two muscular guys touching fingers" (Burrows, 1983c), was correct.

Bar Bet

In the episode *Bar Bet* (Burrows, 1985), Norm and Cliff are seen having a heated debate about Anton Checkov and Henrick Ibsen. Norm said, "It was Checkov Cliffy, I can remember what it was, it was the Cherry Orchard," and Cliff replied, "You're full of it Norm, it was Ibsen and the Masterbuilder" (Burrows, 1985). Diane was amazed and somewhat flattered that they were having an inquiry of such a caliber, and offered to help. They agreed and Cliff asked Diane if she remembers what she was watching on television "that night that Norm stuffed his face with cheese doodles and whistled *The Way We Were*" (Burrows, 1985). Diane was disappointed and answered "Ibsen. And it was taco chips" (Burrows, 1985).

This vignette reveals that the bar patrons whom Diane attempts to enlighten are retaining some of her attempts at cultural improvement. Much to the chagrin of Diane, however, they are remembering the wrong things.

For the first few years of *Cheers*, Diane Chambers was the only cultural and intellectual influence in the bar. Because of this, her goal to make Cheers a *cultured* bar had little chance of being fulfilled. However, in the show's third year, a second cultural influence came into the bar, in the form of Diane's boyfriend Frasier Crane. An increasing number of people of a *higher class* than the regular barflies began to frequent the bar, including Lilith-Sternin Crane, and Robin Colcord, Rebecca Howe's billionaire boyfriend. Thus, the cultural and intellectual awareness of the barflies exhibited a more pronounced change.

Feeble Attraction

The episode *Feeble Attraction* (Burrows, 1989), brings into focus, the bar patrons' value of material worth over historical and cultural value. Robin Colcord sent Rebecca an antique desk as a gift. With it he enclosed a note saying that there was a secret hidden in the desk, but he would not reveal it. He merely gave a one-word hint, *ring*. Rebecca interpreted the message to mean an engagement ring was hidden somewhere in the desk, and in her excitement, began dismantling the desk piece by piece. Later, a message arrived, stating that the desk had been authenticated as having belonged to George Bernard Shaw. After Shaw completed the novel Man and Superman, he rested his teacup on the desk, where it left a distinct mark, and henceforward became known as the ring desk. To this discovery, Sam has only one question, pertaining to Man and Superman, " I wonder if that's the one where he fought the mole people" (Burrows, 1989).

This example illustrates that many of the barflies did not understand the value of history and they were only concerned with materialism. When they discovered that the desk was worth thousands of dollars, they tried to stop Rebecca before she inflicted any more damage on the desk. The bar patrons did not yet appreciate the historical value of culture.

Fifty-Fifty Carla

The *Fifty-Fifty Carla* episode (Burrows, 1990a), focuses on Woody's need to

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prepare a presentation for a simple audition and the resulting cultural one-ups-manship that ensues. Frasier and Robin, suggested various possibilities for a performance. Frasier suggested a dramatic monologue, such as *Cyrano De Bergerac*. Robin does better by suggesting Richard II, and quoted a passage from it. The bar patrons were impressed, and Frasier not wanting to be outdone, quoted a segue from *Cyrano*. Robin was about to defend himself by producing yet another quotation and a literary brawl could be felt brewing between them. But Woody interrupted them, saying that he would just go with what he had thought of in the first place, and put his head between his legs, locked his arms around his legs, and waddled out of the bar.

This episode reveals an evolution of the barflies as appreciative of great literary works. Rather than scoff at the recitations by Frasier and Robin, which would have been the case earlier on in the series, they were now impressed by this feat.

Get My Act Together

In the episode *I'm Gonna Get My Act Together And Stick It In Your Face* (Ackerman, 1991), Frasier was shocked to learn that the gang has never heard of Charles Dickens. He discovered this when Rebecca had broken up with Robin Colcord, and was moping about the bar in her wedding dress. Frasier remarked that "her walking around in that wedding dress was just a tad too Miss Havisham." (Ackerman, 1991), thus prompting an inquiry as to whom he was referring. Frasier explained that Miss Havisham was a character in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, and he was drawn aback to realize that they had no idea what he was talking about. "Surely you know... *Great Expectations*... Pip, Miss Havisham, Magwige... and four pizza-loving turtles who practice martial arts in the sewers" (Ackerman, 1991). Frasier could not believe that they really had no ideal who Charles Dickens was, and asked them "are you really this ignorant, or do you just do this to torture me." and it was met with Norm's reply, "Sometimes the two go hand in hand" (Ackerman, 1991). Realizing that the barflies had never been exposed to Charles Dickens, Frasier took it upon himself to read them *A Tale Of Two Cities*. However, by the first two lines, he sensed that the gang was supremely uninterested, and changed the plot to cater to their likes. "There was a king with a large jaw, and a queen with a fair face on the throne of England... and there was a blood-thirsty clown who beckoned innocent children into the sewer and swallowed them whole" (Ackerman, 1991). Frasier had adjusted Dickens' famous classics so that they would be relished by the mostly uncultured crowd. By the end of the episode, he had them chanting "Dickens!" and asking for more.

This episode illustrates that the barflies did not have a grudge against high culture, but they merely disliked the way it was commonly delivered. *Cheers* had not butchered a famous classic, but instead it had actually managed to present it in a style accepted by the bar audience. Therefore, culture otherwise out of grasp, was now within their reach.

Baby Balk

The episode *Baby Balk* (Burrows, 1991), brings a team of bowlers to the bar, proudly boasting that their friend had just bowled a 300 game. They were extremely jubilant, and one of them was even handing out cigars to all the men in the bar. Accidentally, the bowler gave a cigar to Lilith, and realizing his mistake, he apologized. Lilith replied, "You think that because I'm a woman I won't enjoy this? I'll save it for the George Sand film festival." (Burrows, 1991). The bowler was somewhat confused, and Frasier attempted to clear him up by stating, "What you don't understand is that my wife just made a very funny literary reference to a woman that used to dress as a man and live in France." The bowler asks, "Was he a bowler?" to which Frasier replies, "Sure, what the hell" (Burrows, 1991).

This segment emphasizes that whereas some people who frequent the bar, such as Frasier and Lilith, are of high culture, others will just never be able to understand them completely. The bowlers' attitude toward culture was similar to that which dominated *Cheers* at the beginning of its first season.

Cheers and Cultural Intertextuality

These episodic examples have illustrated that the common barflies have slowly risen

to a higher level of cultural awareness, with the aid of external cultural and intellectual influences. As isolated incidents, these segments would not have any effect of raising *Cheers* to the level of an intertextual *tour de force*. It is when incident after incident is examined, that one realizes that the authors' cultural commentary is not accidental, but most definitely intentional.

Yet another level of this intertextuality can be gleaned from an examination of the titles of the episodes. Again and again, they reflect *high culture*. Examples are: *Norman's Conquest* which refers to the *Norman Conquest of 1066, The Coaches Daughter* which refers to Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*, and *The Peterson Principal* which refers to the famous management motto known as the *Peter Principal*. The *Peter Principal* states that one is promoted until one reaches one's level of incompetence. This is the theme of the episode in which Norm and an Ivy-leaguer compete for the same promotion. Both *The Book of Samuel* and *Honor Thy Mother* have biblical connotations. *Puddin' Head Boyd* refers to the Mark Twain classic *Puddin' Head Wilson*. *Crash of the Titans* is a play on the movie *Clash of the Titans*.

Cheers in Comedic Perspective

In the vast sea of television comedies, one wonders where *Cheers* really fits. Commercial television has engaged in four distinct types of comedy (Inge, 1978). The earliest was the comic personality, such as Gracie Allen or George Burns, with the *Burns and Allen Show*. Next, there developed situation comedies, such as *Leave it to Beaver* or *Donna Reed*, wihch were generally viewed as basic puritanical moralisms sprinkled with mild doses of fun. During the late 1950s, a third type of comedy emerged, which generally employed slapstick humor and characteristically poked fun at authority symbols, such as the law, or the banking profession. This type of comedy is embodied in shows such as *The Real McCoys* and this genre peaked in the 1960s with programs such as *Car 54 Where Are You?* and *Gilligan's Island*. The fourth type of comic television began to dominate in the late 1960s and 1970s. This type included *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and *All in the Family* which incorporated the style of the much earlier *Dick Van Dyke Show*, with more social and political humor. Their substance was probably made possible by the pioneering style of the Smothers Brothers' social and political humor on CBS (Inge, 1978).

Cheers is not truly a personality comedy, nor does it supply the puritanical morals and the good natured family fun of the comedic second type. One might be inclined to group it with the slapstick shows based on its surface appearance, but a close examination eliminates that category as well, primarily due to its references to *high culture* and intertextual allusions. Nor does *Cheers* poke fun at authority figures or people of power, although it does occasionally satirize and poke fun at cultural snobs. *Cheers* is most in its element when grouped in the fourth category, but oddly enough, it does not display any of the political humor so typical to this genre. It does however display social humor, in the clash between bar and culture.

Cheers is set in Boston and is stocked by a microcosm of American society. The characters of the show consist of a mix of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, but are predominantly Irish, Jewish, Italian, White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, blue-collar workers, white-collar society, innocent farm types, and intellectuals. All are exaggerated through the visual and textual representations, thus playing upon cultural stereotypes that are recognized by the viewing public.

Thus, *Cheers* can not be placed wholly in one category of television comedy. It is a blended style, including some of the third genre of slapstick and authority mocking, mixed with a majority of the fourth genre, of the political and social satires. In that respect it most resembles *Mash* with its central characters placed in a home-away-from-home, sharing intimate situations through daily contact and familiarity, mocking authority, and incorporating some high culture while at the same time making the culturally elite the butt of everyday jokes. Both *Cheers* and *Mash* make cultural and political statements, although politics are much milder in *Cheers* than in *Mash*.

When all of the intertextual references within *Cheers* are examined, it is evident that they serve a higher purpose than just to make us laugh. Thus, the show goes far

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beyond a simple, mindless comedy targeted at passive viewers. The intertextual references raise the intellectual level of the program, make it stand out in the vast sea of pre-molded situation comedies, and present an active mental challenge to viewers. Those who possess the background, cultural knowledge see many references to literature, history, and popular culture within the programming.

While *Cheers* can be enjoyed at any level of viewing entertainment, it is particularly stimulating when the influences of other texts are recognized and understood. Further, the visual stimuli that are employed go hand-in-hand with the verbal banter, thus creating a very interesting and intermingled set of challenges for the mentally-alert viewer who attends to the variety of intertextual messages. Certainly, the variety of cues lead to greater understanding for the intelligent viewer, thus revealing the tremendous talent employed in creating the *Cheers* series.

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